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AUTHOR Cravens, Thomas F.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Saint Louis Community College, in Missouri, to determine the characteristics that students associated with excellence in teaching. In the first phase of the study, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to 497 full-time students enrolled primarily in English, Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences, and Business courses, asking students to list those methods and behaviors which they felt resulted in teaching excellence. Utilizing the 20 most frequently cited characteristics and behaviors, a second questionnaire was administered to 423 students in introductory Biology, Business, Chemistry, Psychology, and Sociology courses to develop a point value score for each characteristic. An analysis of results from both phases revealed little overall agreement among students regarding the characteristics of teaching excellence, with the dissimilar characteristics, "uses facts and examples not in the text" and "lectures on contents of the text," both making the top 20. A second pair of dissimilar characteristics, "flexibility" with "an adherence to regulations" was also cited. From the second phase, the top five ranked characteristics were the following: (1) use of relevant examples; (2) clear emphasis on facts; (3) use of visual aids; (4) use of humor; and (5) projects enthusiasm. Appendixes include the open-ended survey instrument used in phase one and the teaching excellence survey instrument from phase two. (TGI)

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Thomas F. Cravens
St. Louis Community College
Meramec

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Students Perceptions of the Characteristics of Teaching Excellence

by Thomas F.Cravens
St. Louis Community College at Meramec

Few professionals have exhibited such an overwhelming preoccupations with the measurement and attainment of excellence as have professional educators. Indeed a vast array of instruments have emerged over several decades which purported to measure or evaluate teachers. Administrative evaluation, per evaluation, student evaluation, and state competency testing constitute the major segment of existing attempts to appraise the effectiveness of teaching.

The intent of this study was to determine what characteristics are associated with excellence in college teaching. It should be noted at the outset, that teaching excellence is not necessarily highly correlated with teaching effectiveness. That is to say that a teacher may be perceived of as being an "excellent" teacher and at the same time not be very effective in facilitating learning. This study attempts to identify and rank those characteristics perceived by college students to be associated with teaching excellence.

This study was developed in two stages. In the initial stage an open ended questionnaire (see appendix A) was administered to some 497 community college students. All of the data utilized in this study were obtained from full time students enrolled at the St. Louis Community College at Meramec. The St. Louis Community College at Meramec is a large (in excess of 11,000 full time equivalences students per semesters) located in an affluent upper middle class suburban environment. This questionnaire was administered to students enrolled primarily in English, the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences and Business courses.

The first stage of the study utilized a questionnaire which asked students to list those methods and behaviors which they felt resulted in teaching excellence. this questionnaire yielded over 200 responses. Many of theses different responses were references to the same characteristic. After combining responses which referred to the same characteristic a ranking, based on frequency was developed. The twenty most frequently listed characteristics were used to developed a questionnaire for the second stage of the study.

The second stage of the study utilized twenty statements relating to characteristics and behaviors listed by students as associated with teaching excellence. The twenty statements were used to construct a questionnaire (see appendix B) with a Likert-type scale. This questionnaire was administered to 423 students. The students participating in this stage of the study were enrolled in the following courses; Introduction to Biology, Introduction to Business, Introduction to Chemistry, Introduction to Psychology, and Introduction to Sociology.

The responses to the questionnaire were used to develop a point value or score for each item. Points were allocated by awarding 5 points for a strongly agree response, 4 points for an agree response, 3 points for an undecided response, 2 points for a disagree response and 1 point for a strongly disagree response. An average score calculated was for each item on the questionnaire with a score of 5 representing the highest possible score and 1 representing the lowest possible score.

Findings

Before the findings of the second stage of the study are discussed it should be pointed out that all of the behaviors and characteristics used in the questionnaire of the second stage represent the strongest characteristics of teaching excellence as measured by the open ended questionnaire in the first stage of this study. It may be inferred that all of the behaviors and characteristics in the second stage questionnaire are perceived of by students as being associated with teaching excellence.

In examining the findings it becomes apparent that students do not agree upon the characteristics of teaching excellence. In two instances two questions can be paired as dissimilar characteristics. The tenth ranking characteristic "Uses Facts and Examples not in the text" and the twentieth ranking characteristic "Lectures on Contents of Text" constitute the first instance of dissimilar characteristics. The second instance of dissimilar characteristics is found with the seventeenth ranking characteristic "Flexible with Regulations in Syllabus" and the nineteenth ranking characteristic "Adheres to Regulations in the Syllabus."

A Ranking of the Characteristics of Teaching Excellence

Characteristic	Rank	Score
Uses "Relevant Examples"	1	4.475
Clear Emphasis on Facts	2	4.440
Use of Visual Aids	3	4.402
Use of Humor	4	4.362
Instructor Projects Enthusiasm	5	4.313
Shows "Practical Applications"	6	4.206
Instructor Being "Personable"	7	4.118
Variation in Tone of Voice	8	4.111
States Expectations for Success	9	4.040
Facts and Examples not in the Text	10	4.038
Uses A Prepared Lesson Outline	11	4.002
Available for Students	12	3.891
Solicit Questions from Students	13	3.882
Provides Additional Handouts	14	3.667
Project a Professional Image	15	3.662
Provides for Extra Credit	16	3.515
Flexible with Regulations in Syllabus	17	3.482
Tests Students Frequently	18	3.343
Adheres to Regulations in Syllabus	19	3.074
Lectures on Contents of Text	20	2.454

(Appendix A)

Survey on Teaching Excellence

As a student, you have had many different teachers and been exposed to an assortment of diverse teaching methods and techniques. We are attempting to determine what teaching methods and techniques seem to be the most effective in promoting learning. We would like to ask you to assist us by listing in the space below some of the techniques, methods, behaviors, or general teaching characteristics which you feel results in "Excellent Teaching."

(please print)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

(Appendix B)

Teaching Excellence Survey

This survey is designed to determine what types of teaching methods and techniques students have found to be most effective in promoting learning. In this survey we have included a range of techniques, methods and behaviors which have been identified by students to be some of the general teaching characteristics which resulted in "Excellent Teaching."

Sincere and honest answers are important for the findings of this research to be of value. So that you can feel free to be as honest as possible we are asking that you **NOT** include your name on this survey.

1. On your answer sheet in the area following the space for name (which you leave blank) please darken the circle indicating your sex.

2. On the answer sheet locate the area for date of birth. By using the two columns for yr. of birth indicate your current age. For example if you are 23 years old you would darken in the number two circle in the first column and the number three circle in the second column.

For the following statements the letters following each of the statements refer to these responses: Strongly Agree = SA, Agree = A, Undecided = U, Disagree = D, and Strongly Disagree = SD. After reading each statement please indicate your reaction to the statement on the answer sheet.

Mark your answer by darkening in the circle as follows Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5.

1. The use of humor in teaching is of great importance in most learning situations.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

2. Visual Aids are of great benefit in most educational situations.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

3. It is very important to learning that teachers use "relevant examples."

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

4. I feel that it is very important for an instructor to provide "practical applications" of course work.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

5. An instructor being "Personable" is an important characteristic of in excellent teaching.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

6. Excellent teachers are always available for individual guidance of students.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

7. Excellent teachers will place **CLEAR** emphasis on important facts.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

8. A prepared master outline of the lesson is very important part of excellent teaching.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

9. An excellent teacher must project enthusiasm.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

10. Excellent teachers provide students with additional handout materials

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

12. Excellent teachers should always solicit questions from students.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

13. Excellent teachers test or quiz their students frequently.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

14. Excellent teachers direct their lectures exclusively to content of the textbook.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

15. Excellent teachers present relevant facts and examples not found in the text.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

16. Excellent teachers are flexible with their class regulations and syllabus.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

17. Excellent teachers always adhere to their class regulations and syllabus.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

18. Excellent teachers need to provide for extra credit beyond the required course work.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

19. Excellent teachers state their expectations for student success.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___

20. Excellent teachers project a professional image with their dress and manners.

SA___ A___ U___ D___ SD___